

## **Award Title**

NYU Ally Week

## **Awards Categories**

International, Multicultural, Cultural, Gender, LGBTQ, Spirituality, Disability, and related

## **Executive Summary**

*“NYU Ally Week provides us an important and new opportunity to support community at NYU.”*

*-President John Sexton, April 2011*

The concept of becoming an ally is not to be taken lightly. Being an ally is not about being a savior or becoming an expert on someone else’s experience. Rather, it is a proactive personal identity choice that enables all members of the University community to play a role in the movement for human rights and social justice. Bearing in mind that Adams, Bell & Griffin (1997) define social justice as both a “process and goal,” *NYU Ally Week* exemplified this philosophy.

At a large private urban institution with hundreds of micro-communities, it is often challenging to foster substantive cross-cultural interactions. As President John Sexton writes, “NYU has a proud legacy of commitment to diversity. It is a core value that is indeed indispensable to our pursuit of excellence in and out of the classroom. University-wide initiatives such as *NYU Ally Week* strengthen this commitment by fostering opportunities for students, faculty, and administrators to deepen their understanding of the experiences of others and raise awareness of the individual and collective injustices that confront many in our society.”

As diversity educators, we are on a constant quest to support members of our campus as they venture out of their comfort zones in our classrooms, residence halls, student events, places of worship, service learning projects, and in our respective “safe” spaces on campus. Working from an intersectional and intercultural understanding of oppression, the entire campus community was challenged to examine stereotypes and prejudice, while highlighting the powerful impact of collectively sharing in an initiative that was grounded in reflecting on what it means to be an ally to others. This becomes increasingly important as NYU, and other universities, begin to globalize and further complicate notions of diversity and identity. *NYU Ally Week* is a model for inviting **all** members of the community to grow and learn collectively.

## **Award Description**

*“Becoming allies means helping each other heal.”*

*-Gloria E. Anzaldua, 1993*

Components of *NYU Ally Week* were initially created in an effort to support the NYU community after a string of high profile LGBTQ bullying-related youth suicides, in which many of the

victims also identified as people of color. *NYU Ally Week* became a way to provide students, faculty, staff, and alumni a platform to reflect on what it means to move from bystanders to becoming active allies to those that face name calling, discrimination, and alienation because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

However as planning for the campaign ensued, it became evident that *NYU Ally Week* could grow even larger to encompass multiple oppressed social groups who often face discrimination and alienation on college campuses across the country. As a result, the New York University Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Student Center and The Center for Multicultural Education and Programs partnered to launch the first-ever *NYU Ally Week* from April 15th -21st, 2011. The inaugural *NYU Ally Week*, themed after Harvey Milk's famous quote "I Am Here to Recruit You," called on all NYU students, staff and faculty to "Pledge to Be an NYU Ally" to people of a different race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual belief, ability, gender identity/expression, economic class, or identity including, and other, than their own. These identity groups are reflected in NYU's non-discrimination and harassment policy.

The *Ally Week* initiative at New York University encompassed a weeklong multimedia campaign that combined social media, "artivism," and social justice. Nearly 500 students and staff members representing a diversity of campus offices and groups wore "I Am Here to Recruit You" *NYU Ally Week* t-shirts to promote the launch of the week. Our collective efforts led to approximately 1,500 more NYU students, faculty, staff and alumni pledging in person or online to become an ally to others. The pledge was accompanied with an "I Have Been Recruited" button and "How to Be an Ally" checklist. The "How to Be an Ally" checklist was comprised of approximately 50 suggestions of several different strategies for taking personal steps to become a campus leader for social justice including: creating safer spaces, educating oneself, examining privilege, tools for helping others deconstruct systems of power, examining societal and institutional oppression, and helping to create sustainable grassroots change in one's community.

Along with the checklist, those who were interested in visually declaring their commitment were able to do so through a weeklong photo campaign. There were close to 170 allies who decided to take the next step and participate in the photo shoot! Participants created personalized messages that accompanied these prompts: "*I am an ally because...*" or "*I am an ally to...*" Photo shoot participants were able to download their images to use them as profile pictures on their Facebook pages. These students, faculty, and staff are now the visual representations of what it means to be an ally at New York University and are featured on the *NYU Ally Week* website.

The University-wide pledge all NYU Allies took included a commitment to the following:

1. Challenge assumptions, myths, and misperceptions.
2. Step out of my comfort zone and seek new knowledge about racism, classism, ageism, ableism, sexism, heterosexism, genderism, and other forms of oppression.
3. Examine my own power and privilege.
4. Work to advocate for one or more oppressed groups to which I may or may not belong.
5. Utilize the Ally Week Checklist to create tangible change at NYU.

In an effort to reach an optimal number of campus community members, several units supported the initiative. The Center for Spiritual Life; the Office of Residential Life and Housing Services; the Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU; the NYU Center for Student Activities, Leadership, and Service; the NYU Office of International Students and Scholars; and the NYU Student Resource Center disseminated information and became satellite-pledging stations. Participating units also supported the initiative by holding diversity education events throughout the week to provide safe spaces for learning and developing. Student leaders were also encouraged to create collaborative projects throughout the semester for members of the New York University community to begin their ally work.

*NYU Ally Week* provided a rare, one of a kind communal opportunity at New York University for students, staff, and faculty to unite around a common cause and to take tools and resources back into their various micro-communities to educate, inspire, and create change. The campaign has also inspired several other campus-based initiatives that can be found in the additional supplemental information section. By expanding the traditional framework of LGBTQ ally building to include multiple identities, *NYU Ally Week* fostered a deeper understanding of building inclusive spaces and a more supportive campus community.

***“Every one of us needs allies, and every one of us can take the role of an ally for someone else.”***

***-Ricky Sherover-Marcuse***

### ***Supplemental Information***

One of the most impactful aspects of *NYU Ally Week* was the photo campaign. These photos are a lasting testament to the passion and diversity of the New York University community. In order to fully grasp the impact of *NYU Ally Week*, we urge you to view the Ally Week photos, the student-produced Ally Week video, and the “Ways to Be an Ally” Checklist from the following sites:

- [Photos from the Ally Week Photo Shoot](#)
- [Ally Week Website with Video](#)
- [“Ways to Be an Ally” Checklist](#)

### ***Additional Supplemental Information***

- [Online NYU Ally Week Pledge powered by Change.org](#)
- [NYU Ally Week Events](#)
- [Listofover 1,000 Pledge Signatures](#)
- [Washington Square News Article \( April 12, 2011\)](#)
- [Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life Article \(April 13, 2011\)](#)
- [NYU Local Article \( April 11,2011\)](#)
- [So So Gay Article \( June 1, 2011\)](#)
- [Replicated NYU Ally Week Campaign at Virginia Tech](#)

- [Rutgers University "Give Where You Live" Service Campaign inspired by NYU Ally Week](#)

### **Assessment Data**

While several of the events that took place during *NYU Ally Week* had their own assessment protocol, the following data was collected using an online survey in the Fall of 2011. When asked if *NYU Ally Week* had positively impacted the campus community, 100% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that *Ally Week* did have a positive impact. The survey was sent to faculty, staff, and students and included a qualitative response to how *NYU Ally Week* had impacted them as individuals as well as the campus community as a whole. The following is a representative sampling of that assessment data.

### ***Student Responses***

- “Ally Week is valuable because of its advocacy for supporting not just LGBTQ identities, but any identity or group that you don't identify with. This factor makes Ally Week accessible to the entire community and helps foster a more general understanding.” -Ellis, Undergraduate Junior
- “Ally Week isn't about any one community, it's about all oppressed and/or marginalized people, recognizing their struggles and standing in solidarity with them. It unites people even as it acknowledges differences.” -Emily, Undergraduate Senior
- “NYU Ally Week played a vital role on the campus community by making students aware of the importance of being an ally. By creating an initiative like this it not only expands knowledge but creates a comfortable space for students.” -Zach, Graduate Student
- “NYU Ally Week gave me the time and space to reflect on what I was doing as an ally, what was going on around me, and what I could do to improve what I was seeing. NYU Ally Week also showed me that there were many people on campus whom I could tap into to create change in the NYU community and beyond.” -Cynthia, Undergraduate Senior
- “The photography project was one of my favorite parts of Ally Week!” -Kathryn, Undergraduate Sophomore
- “Ally Week is valuable for the campus community because it shows people that they do not necessarily have to identify with a certain community in order to support them and be an ally.” -Sophie, Undergraduate Sophomore
- “NYU Ally Week inspired me to think about what it means to truly be an ally. It has broadened my definition of what it means to be an ally and has helped me create new ways to support groups I'm already affiliated with as well as reach out to others.” - Francesca, Undergraduate Sophomore

### ***Administrator Responses:***

- “I think Ally Week promoted an awareness of what it means to support people with different identities than myself. I saw many students explain to other students the importance of being an ally. It was powerful to watch this education happen. A sense of

solidarity among the building during the week felt palpable. Students loved wearing the shirts and promoting the cause. I am so excited to participate again this year!” - Administrator, Residential Life & Housing Services

- “Ally Week presents an opportunity for the campus community to learn what it means to be an ally and to get involved with diversity and social justice initiatives on campus - in a more wide scale, university-wide fashion. The wingspan of the campaign reached many sub-communities of NYU and helped the entire university community feel united through an initiative.” -Administrator, Student Affairs
- “NYU Ally Week is an excellent way to get the message out regarding under-represented and marginalized groups on campus, and in society at large. Those who were exposed to the initiative were given information and suggestions on how to be more inclusive in their everyday lives.” -Administrator, Residential Life & Housing Services
- “It gives an opportunity for students of multiple identities to think about ways to be an ally to communities outside of their own. Often times NYU is experienced by the many micro-communities on campus, but Ally Week gives an opportunity for these communities to come together and for individuals who do not feel connected to any one community to also participate in the process.” -Administrator